Grads facing uncertain future

By Peter Blais

Turf school graduates are having more trouble finding entry-level jobs as assistant superintendents than they did a year ago, according to college officials.

"We usually graduate 45 to 50 students," said Professor Richard Cooper, coordinator of the University of Massachusetts two-year turf management program.

"Last year was the first time they weren't all able to get jobs. This year it's been even worse. It's taking a lot more work to find positions."

Cooper blames a weak economy, particularly in the Northeast, for the bleak job market.

Continued on page 8

Japanese course basher sets sights on Hawaii

By Peter Blais

His goal is nothing short of stopping all golf course development, period. And Hawaii is his latest target.

"It's not possible to build a good golf course," said Gen Morita of the The Global Network for Anti-Golf Course Action.

You can't put something like that on 150 acres and expect it to not hurt the environment, unless you stick it in the middle of the desert. But if you build it in the usual way, it's just not possible."

Before developers dismiss the 44-year-old Japanese activist as just another fly in the ointment, they ought to consider his record.

Morita claims to have had a hand in stopping construction of 280 Japanese courses through his work with the Japan National Network Against Resort and Golf Course Development. Since 1988, the group has helped obtain moratoriums against new development in 10 of Japan's 46 prefectures.

With Japanese corporations financing many of Hawaii's new courses, Morita turned his attention to the 50th state last

Continued on page 24

Maintenance costs continue upward spiral

From Staff Reports

Higher payroll expenses caused country club maintenance costs to jump almost 10 percent last year, despite efforts to cut back on repairs and other costs. Average payroll climbed 10 percent (to $15,888 per hole) while payroll taxes and benefits rose 16.8 percent (to $3,610 per hole) at 250 private U.S. country clubs surveyed by the accounting firm of Pannell Kerr Forster in its 1992 Clubs in Town & Country report.

Continued on page 39
Japanese course basher takes arguments to Hawaii

Continued from page 1

fall. Morita said more than 100 projects are under construction or planned in Hawaii. Better than half involve Japanese corporations. Japanese companies own 35 percent of the state’s agricultural land, prime areas for future golf course development, he added.

“I understand he’s pretty persuasive with the people in Japan and with some of the environmental groups in Hawaii. I imagine they’ve welcomed him with open arms. A lot of development is being financed with Japanese money and there are people only too happy here to listen to his message,” said Dennis Vogt, Dye Designs International’s director of turf maintenance and head superintendent of Royal Hawaiian Country Club, a 36-hole course scheduled to open its first 18 in June.

Morita first spoke at a community-based anti-golf conference sponsored by the Hawaii Golf Course Action Alliance in November. He returned for two weeks in January, touring some of the state’s most controversial developments, speaking at anti-golf development meetings and testifying before local governing bodies.

Was he effective?

“Testified before the Honolulu City Council on one project in the morning and he testified on another in the afternoon,” said environmental consultant Stuart Cohen of Environmental & Turf Services Inc. of Wheaton, Md.

“I didn’t hear him. All I know is the council approved the project I was working on and rejected the one he talked about.”

Doug Jones, a reporter with the Hilo Hawaii Tribune Herald on the Big Island of Hawaii, where a course development moratorium has been considered, covered Morita’s visits.

“He has a very understated approach, speaks English well and is very persuasive,” Jones said.

In his younger days, Morita operated a Tokyo-based trading company and played golf occasionally. Seeking a simpler lifestyle, he sold his business and moved 100 miles from Tokyo to smaller Kamogawa in Chiba Prefecture. He became a subsistence farmer, joining a Buddhist temple that promoted a natural gardening method that even forbid the tilling of soil.

“That was the first time I became aware of the environmental problems with golf,” Morita said.

He has since become Japan’s leading anti-continent.
Basher wants to stop any and all golf developments

Continued from page 34

golf development voice on the international scene, basically because "no one else in our group speaks English that well."

"They promise high-paying jobs to everyone but they are not paying and the resorts generate little income," Vogt said. They drive up land prices, making it too expensive for local people to afford $300 or $400 hotel rooms or $100 to play golf," Morita said.

"We don't use chemicals if we don't need them," Vogt assured. Socially, golf courses, particularly at resort facilities like those dominating Hawaiian development, cater exclusively to rich people who can "afford $300 or $400 hotel rooms and $100 to play golf," Morita said.

"Japanese regulations have gotten very tough for the yakuza. People want to learn more about them. We hear some of the same intimidation tactics they use in Japan are going on here."

"There are 75 courses there already and into other countries. We penetrated the yakuza money. People want to bend the zoning rules for a Kona developer," Jones said.

"We’ve pushed the yakuza out of Japan and into other countries. We feel partly responsible for their efforts to develop overseas. That’s why we’ve established the Global Network, to oppose all golf course development throughout the world," Protheroe said.

"We've pushed the yakuza out of Okinawa. It’s a good idea. Golf courses taken away from the military. Hawaii is one of those places they are looking at," Morita said.

"Developers don’t care about the local culture. They don’t make their remedies blend in," he said.

Anti-golf forces have stopped development in Japan by using education and convincing government boards to deny permits. Showing a connection between a project and the yakuza, Japan’s organized crime syndicate, has also brought many projects to a halt.

"Japanese regulations have gotten very tough for the yakuza the past two or three years. It’s pushed them out of the country to areas with less stringent regulations, less opposition and cheaper land. Hawaii is one of those places they are looking at," Morita said.

"There are some connections between Hawaiian development and yakuza. Anti-golf groups have tried to connect Royal Hawaiian’s Japanese developer Y.V. Corp. with organized crime, he added. "It’s not valid," Vogt said. "They’ve made statements that the course will never be finished. It’s hurting membership sales some, but we’ll get through it."

Morita is working with Japanese journalist Tsutomu Kaji on a book concerning Japanese investment in Hawaiian resorts and plans future visits to the island state.

"We want to stop all golf course development in Hawaii," he said. "There are 5 courses here already on a very small group of islands. That’s enough."

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